

A MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH  
TO THE FAMILY  
DURING THE LIFE-CYCLE

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A Professional Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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*This professional project, completed by*

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty  
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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## PREFACE

We are not living in an ordinary time. The present is a time of intense and unrelenting pain for many human beings. Atrocities, real and repeated, proliferate within our social order. Too often, this misery finds no healing within the ministries and services of the local church. Here, in what should be the best of healing arts and community building, we find a hollowness, which mocks our claim to wholeness and holiness within the church. Here, within the church, we paste over and band-aid the deep sores and gaping wounds that persons suffer. Frequently, the worst hurt is our will not to respond to what we sense happening around us and within us.

In this life, we prepare for many things, for moments and events, for a variety of situations. We worry about wrongs, think about injustices, ponder upon what Jesus Christ teaches us, contemplate the complexities of a Margaret Mead or a Paul Tillich, caress our own wounds, perhaps even express our own pain and suffering in the "now" of our own life. Then, all of a sudden, the issue is not whether we agree with what we have heard or read or planned or studied. The issue is us - and what we have become.

I am increasingly discontented by what I experience in my own ministry as a pastor responsible for a small United Methodist Church in Southern California. My agony does not diminish my commitment to the professional ministry; rather, it increases my determination to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, continuing to learn the arts of ministry.

The pain with myself, as well as with the sufferings of the people in my parish, serves to alert me to the stern realities of the present in my church. That reality is this: theology is not of help if it cannot be worked and lived within the parish situation. If you believe in something, turn that belief into concrete deed. Any idea we genuinely believe in and feel to be our own must be enacted, executed; made incarnate, given flesh in the way in which we live out that belief in daily deed and style. For me, my ideas about the family and the church must be applied within the realm of the real world, within the rip-tides and cross-currents of the parish, congregational life, my family, and my own being.

I believe that truth, be it from theology, psychology, or whatever, occurs when actions take place, not when words are contrived. Truth is not a word which represents correct responses to an examination of search for facts. Truth is only a right deed which can be done. Truth has to be undertaken. Truth dares to be lived.

It is this quest for a truth undertaken, my own need to develop a working, living-deed theology and psychology that has turned me toward the subject of this professional project, in which I shall develop my own working theology of the church and seek to apply it to a ministry to the family during the life-cycle.

Acknowledgments are boxes which hold only portions of their material. Many have helped with the preparation of this material, and in a number of ways. Some have given tangible aid in reading, criticizing, and making suggestions.

Others have assisted by their ideas and discussions. Still more have rendered substantial aid through their personal support and concern. There are some who by their example and by endurance demonstrate some of the ideas set forth on the following pages. Finally, there are those who are the thinkers, writers, and poets who have put down principles, philosophies, and expressions which have served to undergird many of my ideas and thoughts.

As always, my immediate family has been encouraging and helpful in numerous ways. My adolescent children have taught me more than books and professors about their cycle of the family. My wife has taught me daily the meaning of being the Church. Last of all, my aged mother continues to reveal the joy and grace of growing old gently.

Of a more general appreciation are my professors, colleagues, and members of my congregation, who have given so much encouragement and support to me during this part of my life journey.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to design a model for ministry to the family during the four dominant stages of the life cycle, which for our purposes were: Birth, Parenting, and Nurturing Cycle, Adolescent Cycle, Middle Life Cycle, and the Aged Adult Cycle.

We began the project by working a systematic foundation for ministry. We did this by first defining what the church is, and from out of this, what its ministry should be, if it is faithful. We have supported this definition through a detailed examination of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of the church. At the end of the first section, we establish our definition of ministry in the local church setting, pulling it through the thought of Bonhoeffer, and bringing it to focus on the family, as the point of ministry.

The second part of this project has been to build a ministry to the family during the life cycle. We have selected the four cycles as mentioned above. With each of the cycles, we have examined some of the psychological needs and applied the design for ministry at that stage to answer, so far as possible, those needs. In all cycles, we have attempted to make ministry be concrete expressions of a church's faith, thus integrating theology into ministry.

As the result of this project, we have concluded that unless such an integration of theology and ministry is achieved, then the theology is hollow and ministry is empty. Furthermore, it is our conclusion that ministry should grow

out of a theology grounded in the concrete realities of the world, if it is to deserve the term "ministry".



## INTRODUCTION

The scope of this project is to develop a working model for ministry by the local church and its members to the family during the changing life cycle. In order to do this, I will give my definition of the church, substantiate it with supportive evidence from the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom we will briefly describe in biography. From this, I will seek to describe what ministry is, as a result of knowing what the church should be. To give concreteness to this view of ministry, I will suggest a model for ministry to the family. Finally, I will summarize what results when an integration of theology and the practical arts of ministry occurs in a local church.

There is for each of us the need to grow, to learn, to voyage, and to explore, in terms of our own consciousness of what the church is and what ministry is about. There is also a much deeper need to find one solid core of concrete and specific action-dedication in one neighborhood, with one set of loyalties, one group of allies, and one deep, deep dream of love and transformation. This is my challenge. Because it is, I want to make the church a healing encounter, a human development center, wherein faith becomes a concrete deed of servanthood living out responsible freedom and unconditional love, and where each member is engaged in an active ministry of experienced hope, faith, and love.

PART I  
A THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

## Chapter 1

### THE CHURCH DEFINED

#### CHURCH AS EVENT

Many of the Christians in my present parish do not know what the church is or what its ministry should be to the community and the world. The church is where the people of God are taking servant shape around the needs and hopes of the world - as servants of Christ and of humanity itself. The church is called to move into the world as Christ still moves in the world. The church is an event, a happening that Christ calls into being from day to day. As an event, the church occurs as a gift of the Spirit where the Word evokes faith or enables faith to become a deed.

The church is not an end in itself; it is the servant of the mission of God in the world. The Church exists for the world. The Church lives so that the world may know its true being. It is called to the service of all humankind, of the world. It has to seek out those situations in the world that call for loving responsibility. There it must announce and point to shalom. The church is that part of the world where God's concern is recognized and celebrated.

#### CHURCH AS SERVANT OF GOD'S PURPOSE

The church is the servant of God's purpose in and for history. God is working out that purpose in the evolution of history. The church is the servant of God's struggle in and for the world. The church seeks and finds the point in the world where Christ is carrying out his struggle. The

church, through its ministry of love and servanthood, makes that struggle visible, and indeed, celebrational.

As a project.

The church as event may also be seen as project. It is God's project in the world. Here, the church becomes a way of obedience which must continually be fashioned within the particular situation and general purpose of God in the world and for the world. The church is the instrument that Christ uses to bring to realization God's purpose. The church is the servant of God's mission in and for the world, and, as such, takes on the servant role as serving Christ in the midst of the struggles of persons for a genuinely worldly existence. The church can only be the church as it is the community of obedience to Christ within the structures of life where human existence is played out. The church is, in its essence, the inner unity of those who share Christ's solidarity with all the world, and, amid human suffering and sin, shows what we can be through the victorious power of God.

As a pilgrim people.

Seen as an event, the church is a pilgrim people moving across space and time in the fullest participation in the mission of Jesus Christ. The church is that community of pilgrims always on the servant-way, entering new land, following the leadership of God. In all the stages of the pioneering movement, the gospel and witness to the Lord is the same: but in every new situation, it demands new positions to be relevant. The pilgrim-servant knows the Word is a

living word, offering fresh food and living water to the people who are living, struggling, and dying today. The church is never at home. It never settles down. It is always pointing beyond itself to the Lord. Yet, when it yields unlimited obedience to God, it is everywhere at home. Even in dangerous and revolutionary times, the pilgrim church knows that its sovereign Lord continually creates newness out of chaos. The church faces the present and the future with openness. It does the word and deed, the act and being, the enfleshed work of the Lord in faith and joy and love.

#### BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

In these brief paragraphs, I have sought to lay before the reader my understanding of the church. I have by no means, given details, as I propose to weave them into a summary of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thought about the church.

#### Biographical sketch.

Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau, Germany, in 1906, on February 4th, of parents deeply rooted in Christian, humanitarian, and liberal traditions. While yet an adolescent, Bonhoeffer began the study of theology. He was a brilliant scholar, a great realist, open to all the things which make life beautiful, deeply compassionate, and a courageous man who put his life on the line in his intense struggle with Nazism, as it came to power in Germany.

In 1935, Bonhoeffer, already locked in an ideological struggle with National Socialism, as a member of the Confessional Church, and a dynamic pastoral leader, established

an illegal seminary. Here it was that persons learned what is so needed today - how, in the twentieth century, a Christian life should be lived.

The Gestapo arrested Bonhoeffer in 1943. He was executed by special order of Himmler on April 19, 1945, at the concentration camp at Flossenbourg, just a few days before it was liberated by the Allied forces.

The guiding force in Bonhoeffer's life was his faith and love of God, in whom he found peace and happiness. It was his brotherly love for other people which also caused Bonhoeffer to believe so completely in Christian action and self-sacrifice. He stood for what is called Christian Humanism today. Bonhoeffer offered his life for a new understanding of the personal life rooted in the Christian faith. According to Bonhoeffer, Christianity has its place in this world and the Church, as the Body of Christ. The fellowship in Him can only be the visible Church. Persons seeking faith must follow him who has served and passed through this world as the living, dying, and risen Lord. Thus, when it pleases God to put a person in this world, the Christian must be ready for martyrdom and death. It is only in this way that a person learns faith, insisted Bonhoeffer.

If self-sacrifice is the highest fulfillment of the human being, and if the value of a person depends on the measure of sacrifice to which one is called to exercise for the sake of responsible love, then Bonhoeffer's life and death belongs to the modern acts of the Apostles. His good fight has been a living symbol that the spiritual has the

primacy over the material. His story has become the story of the victory of the spirit of the loving and truly human person over evil.

What Bonhoeffer did and others have done or will do, cannot be expected from the many. The future in our society depends on the quiet heroism of the very few who are inspired by God. These few enjoy divine inspiration. They are, and will be, prepared to stand for the dignity of humankind and true freedom and to keep the law of God, even if it means death or martyrdom.

Thus, Bonhoeffer's life and death have given us great hope for the future. He has set a model for a new type of leadership inspired by the gospel, ready each day for death, and imbued by a new spirit of Christian humanism and a creative sense of civic duty. The victory which he has won was a victory for all of us, a conquest never to be undone, of light, liberty, and love.

#### Selection of Bonhoeffer.

There are many competent theologians, but none have inspired and challenged me as Bonhoeffer. None have forced me to examine my faith, the style of my ministry, and my life as does Bonhoeffer. None have shaped me as has Bonhoeffer. None have helped me understand and apply the Scripture to my life and ministry as thoroughly and concretely as Bonhoeffer. That I am again and again drawn to a study of Bonhoeffer is a source of birth and death, pain and joy for me. As I study more and more, Bonhoeffer becomes a more abiding friend, walking with me in my spirit journey to wholeness.

There are four general reasons for my selection of Bonhoeffer rather than someone else, in addition to my own very personal reasons. First, I think Bonhoeffer understood the world I live in, a world as competitive and torn as the world forty years ago. The materialism of our age, the cynicism and separateness of people, the utter chaos that is rampant, as flux becomes the normative for most of us; all these Bonhoeffer understood, for they were his world. Ours is a restless and rootless generation. We know the terrors and excesses of technology, as it becomes evil and inhuman. So did Bonhoeffer, as he watched and fought the rise of the Nazis under Hitler. As did Bonhoeffer, we know of evil and wickedness, and society's capacity for the corruption of the human spirit. We are aware of our misery and our grandeur, as, like Bonhoeffer, we see ourselves as a riddle, a conflict raging within us. Change is erupting on all sides of us. We are a perpetually problem-plagued people. Joys come to us, but we are never without problems. We progress and advance, only to fall backward again. Our coping with the present is difficult enough without asking us to be responsible for the future or to bend it to our will. The boundary situations such as sickness, suffering, or death, no longer claim much of our energies. Our religion, if we have one, tries to cover a chronic secularism. We speak of God as a crutch getting us through life. Bonhoeffer called this "a world come of age", by which he meant that we live in a world that rightly refuses to fall prey to any religion that makes it dependent on things it no longer needs, or thrusts



problems on it that are not really problems, or that exploits its weaknesses for purposes alien to the world.

Secondly, Bonhoeffer clearly discerns the universal meaning of Jesus Christ. His understanding of the world is based upon his christology. He understood that it is God's will, revealed in Jesus Christ, that has forced humanity to recognize the de-divinization of the world and its gods. For Bonhoeffer, it is God who demands we be worldly, involved in all that is going on in the world as we experience it. This is possible because Jesus Christ reveals to us all we know of the world. In Jesus Christ, God and the world are held in unity. In Christ, the reality of God entered the reality of the world. It is for this reason that the Christian cannot withdraw from the world, but through Christ is led to the world, and still sees the world in true perspective, in the light of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, I selected Bonhoeffer because he calls the church and all its members to rigorous discipleship, a close following of the Master into the world. There is no cheap grace here; there is a cost of following Jesus closely. Only by following close to Jesus does the disciple attain a truly worldly life; for then do we follow him into the midst of the world, into its depths, its trivialities, its bondages, because that is where Christ is. The Word became flesh, dwelt among us, was rejected, and died on a cross. That Word was Jesus and this becomingness was a costliness of grace and reconciliation. The cost of discipleship is the cost He who calls us to be disciples made. The Word waits to be born

in our flesh as we deed and do our love as pilgrims on the servant-way living love in freedom and obedience. Bonhoeffer insisted that the disciple of Jesus Christ can live in the midst of the world as one in whom the knowledge of death and resurrection is ever present.

The fourth and last reason for choosing Bonhoeffer is that his life gives validity to his words. He laid his life on the line and did not retreat to security or pacifist position. He lived out what he said. He humanized his faith by giving it his own flesh. His life witnessed to the integrity and authenticity of his faith in Jesus Christ, beside whom he walked so closely during the crisis that was Nazi Germany. Bonhoeffer was a richly human person, by which we mean he made the decision to plunge deeply and boldly into life and wrest from it what it could yield of truth, beauty, and goodness.

This concludes our introduction of the reader to the life of Bonhoeffer, the man. I want to examine some of his thoughts about the church, wherein we encounter such rich terms as "neighbor", "I-Thou", "worldly", "servant", and "man for others".

#### Demand for concreteness.

Bonhoeffer spoke very seriously about the utter concreteness and continuity of the Incarnation in the church. His christology found its fundamental expression in his doctrine of the church. Bonhoeffer's favorite definition of the church appears to have been: Christ

existing as community. He understood it to be a community constituted by the presence of Christ in the Word, in the sacrament, and in the fellowship of the faithful persons who live according to the principle of vicarious action, which is an active being for one another. The church is Christ's body, which does not mean the community of worshipers of Christ, but rather that Christ has taken form among people.

Bonhoeffer claimed that people meet God in the encounter with other persons in community. He understood this in terms of an "I-Thou" community surrounded encounter. Thus, the church is the sphere of an authentic encounter with God because here the neighbor is not recognized as the ultimate boundary of life, but Christ in the neighbor. The neighbor's "Thou" is the divine thou meeting me in grace and judgment. Bonhoeffer's passion for concreteness drove him to affirm the empirical church, the personal community of "neighbors-in-Christ", as the locale of encounter with God in revelation.

What takes place in the church takes place as an illustration for all people. On the one hand, the congregation stands as God's deputy in the world, and, on the other hand, the world achieves its fulfillment in the congregation. The church stands in this two-fold relationship wholly in the fellowship and discipleship of its Lord, who was the Christ by virtue of his existence, not for his own sake, but fully for the sake of the world. The church is its true self only when it exists for all humanity, when the

church exists in the world for the world. The church has a responsible task sharing in the problems of the world. The message the church announces and embodies is for all mankind. Bonhoeffer saw the church, and the Christian as well, standing along side God, fully participating in the suffering of God in the life of the world.

Bonhoeffer saw the task of the church as being to tell all persons, whatever their calling, what it means to live in Christ and for others. When the church discovers what this means, and applies it with utter seriousness to itself and the world, then church people will find that being Christian, which means being fully human, has radical implications for every area of life. I should perhaps add, at this point, that being fully human is the action of plunging deeply into the life of the here and now. We experience this fullest measure of being human in the community we have with the neighbor.

#### Dialectical tension within the church.

There is a dialectical tension of the church that must be safeguarded. The one side of the church rests on the insistence for human sociality and christological unity. Christ exists as community. Christ is present within the church and to the world in the concrete I-Thou neighbor encounter and relationship of the Christian community. The thou of the Christian is the thou of Christ. The many thous of the church are one, because they are the concrete media of the one thou of Christ. The one side of this

dialectic tension rests then on the intimate and concrete identification of Christ.

The other side of this tension is that the church is sinful as well as holy. Christ stands over and even against the church as well as within it. This is in judgment as well as in sanctification. There is a tight tension between the human side of the church and the divine side of the church. There is a duality of the dialectic as we maintain that the church is both worldly and holy, that the church is both a social institution and the judgment of God on society, and finally, the church is a religious organization and the communion of saints.

For Bonhoeffer, the duality of the church is evident always at the same time. One who sees only one side of the two does not see the church as it really is. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer rejects the misunderstanding that the church is simply a matter of present and future, visible and invisible. His emphatic insistence on the concreteness of Incarnation in the world and the cost of concrete obedience to Christ, holds the dialectic tension firm and secure. For him, there is no postponed reality to the church. This avoids the trap of cheap grace, so many find attractive.

Bonhoeffer takes the middle road with Luther to push further his theology of the church. At this point, he maintains a doctrine of the church in concrete terms as simultaneously the actual literal presence of Christ on earth and a sinful, broken, and compromising religious society.

Bonhoeffer believed that Christ himself is present and speaks in the physical presence and sinful speech of the Christian. This view sees the church as concretely holy, the bearer of God to the world with God's own authority, yet struggling and sinful until God's complete triumph over sin and death in the Parousia. Bonhoeffer, like Luther, accepted the paradox of the divine-human nature of the church. He argued that the church's word to the world must always be a concrete and contemporary word. The voice of the church must be the voice of Christ, always being clear and direct, never general or abstract. Likewise, in actions taken by the church; they must be bold, decisive deeds done on behalf of the world. As such, they must embody the Spirit of the One who risked life itself for the sake of the world He loved. The indicative of the church's reality - divine and human - is the urgent basis for the ethical imperative: Become what you are!

Out of this insistence upon concrete words and deeds as manifestations of the divine-human paradox and reality of the church grows the doctrine of justification by faith. This means that the Christian is liberated for courageous and responsible speaking and doing in the world. The church is set free to speak and act boldly for the sake of the world as proof of its being the very presence of Christ in the world. The church in Christ is the community of forgiven sinners who are empowered by their work in Christ to overcome the timidity they suffer and to launch out into the deep as those pilgrim people accepted by God inspite of themselves.

### Church-world solidarity.

The church lives in and for the sake of the world. All persons have been objectively reconciled to God in Christ. The church, according to Bonhoeffer, is simply that portion of humankind which is subjectively conscious of the glad tidings of forgiveness. The task of the Christian community is to proclaim to the rest of the world, in word and deed, the joyous good news which is true for all humankind. This subjective knowledge of forgiveness is the only privilege of the church. The church stands together with the world under the curse of sin and death and the judgment of God. However, the church knows that sin and death have been overcome, and God's judgment has been reversed. This preserves the fullest solidarity of the church with the world. This insists the church participate fully in the world, for the sake of that world. This is exactly the word-deed place God commissions and empowers the church and the individual Christian to be - in the world, but not of the world. Nowhere else is the church to be the church. There are four very basic elements in this concept of church-world solidarity, which we need to examine briefly.

First, Bonhoeffer's enthusiastic Christian world affirmation lies at the heart of his pleas that the church say "Yes!" to the modern world, as the earth which God loves, judges, forgives, and reconciles in Jesus.

Second, Bonhoeffer's "this-worldliness" fully recognized and affirmed the tragedy, perversity, suffering,

and dying of a fallen world. But he also realized there is a "hidden treasure" in the world, that God has both condemned and redeemed the world. This was done in Jesus Christ. This thought clings very tightly to the profound dialectical, authentic nature of the church.

Third, Bonhoeffer hammered out the theme that the resurrection of Jesus is "this-worldly". This is the affirmation by God of this earthly, bodily existence, and at the same time the re-creation, the making new, of that existence. Bonhoeffer was very critical of the church's soft position interpreting Christ's resurrection as a religious myth. He opted for the position of the thoroughly this-worldly understanding of the resurrection.

Fourth, Bonhoeffer gradually moved to a further radicalized commitment to the theme of the church's solidarity and identification with the world. Still, he held a firm appreciation for worship and private devotional life, the latter sustaining him during his imprisonment. His radical, public, this-worldly dialectic positions about the church were always grounded in a traditional discipline of worship, prayer, and teaching.

As Bonhoeffer looked at the church, he came to the conclusion that the church cannot speak words to the present world. It can only offer silent actions, following its Lord in silently suffering and serving the world. The church performs this righteous action in the world without, while living a life of prayer within.



Scattered in the world.

The church is scattered within the world, yet remains the servant community. Prayer within, responsible human action without; secret discipline and public discipleship; these are the tension poles of Christian experience out of which the transformation of both church and world will come. The Biblical word "leaven" catches the picture of the church's impact upon the world. By leaven, we mean that the Christian lives a life that penetrates deep into the life of the world. A church that is leavening to the world is a scattered church of individual members.

The church must make a convincing and concrete demonstration that it exists only for the sake of the world and all humanity. Our world hungers for the church to indeed its words in signal actions that mean it is a viable community existing on behalf of the world. The form of Jesus Christ in the world is simply and only human. The Christian community must have the courage to live in the world like anyone else, taking its place along side its secular neighbors.

The church, in addition to being leavening in the world, also has a servant role to give the world, by which we mean the church being present in the world for others, helping and serving with the problems and burdens of the world. The church has no right to stand over society; to enact and re-dramatize the suffering servant of Jesus Christ, as well as to stand with society is its divine commission. This is what "being-there-for-others" means for the church and Christian in our world. To live in Christ is to be for others, even as Christ was and is for us and everyone.

The human example is terribly crucial. If the Christian life is to be fully human, as I believe it should be, then it will have to be conformed to the pattern of the Man whose whole being was "being-there-for-others". The Christian believes that the meaning of what it is to be fully human has been given us in the man Jesus. To be a human being according to the Christ-pattern is, above all else, to be an "I" for a "thou", one who is ethically responsible for a neighbor in every area of life. This demands that we live in and for the world as did Jesus. This means that we be integrated within ourselves, disciplined, and truly free; that in all things we put ourselves at God's disposal. Word and action cannot be separated: human example gives the word emphasis and power. The Christian is liberated because of a thorough self-discipline. This makes the Christian able for the task of living in the world, and living it fully in the world. The servant church in the world must live solely by the word of God; it must be stronger and more disciplined than ever before to be both fully human and radically this-world.

The church's impact upon the world will be largely the leaven of its members' lives, serving their neighbors modestly and quietly alongside them. The inner life of the Christian community will be silent and hidden. The catacombs ought to be revisited, indeed reclaimed.

Only from a rigorous discipline of life will Christians be made capable of living as Christian people in the world. Only in this manner is the Christian able to serve responsibly and intelligently in the world. The church - that community

of Christians - must become a cell group, a fellowship of committed disciples grounded deeply in the Word of God as word-ed and deed-ed in Jesus Christ. This is the birth-ground of this-world Christianity. Here, it is nurtured. The form of the church is the body of Christ in the world. It has always been the I-Thou community of forgiven sinners called together by and in the name, power, style, and spirit of Christ. The church is wherever the fabric of full humanity is restored, wherever a full and rich humanness abounds. The essence of the church is this: Christ is the man-for-others, with all the implications of the I-Thou relationship workable.

We have attempted to give an over-view of Bonhoeffer's thought about the church, its birthright, its forms, its task and its destiny. Admittedly sparse, due to the confinements of our task in this project, we hope it serves as a general guide for what a ministry by a church should be. It will serve as a theological grounding for our design of a church's ministry to the family during the life-cycle.

#### DEFINITION OF MINISTRY

##### Incarnational.

Before we begin to sketch the design, I want to make a statement of what I believe to be ministry. I have said that our verbal witness ought to always issue in deed. The word requires flesh to be valid and to possess power. In this, there is a need for the church to train its membership for service in the structures of the world at the places where

the real struggles for human fulfillment occur. The church should train us in being obedient to and in our Lord in the complicated situations of our human endeavors and encounters. The church is called to follow the Word toward the struggle-points requiring obedience as servants, and there let the word become flesh in the body of the laos.

### Task of the whole laos.

Ministry is the task of the whole laos of the church. In a sense, it belongs to all of society, but it is pointedly expected within the church and from all its members. A ministry is not verbal so much as a deed lived in obedience or an act of love carried forth responsibly in freedom. Ministry is affective as well as cognitive. Ministry is helping each other find meaning as persons. It is a seeking to share human wholeness and fulfillment. It is a touching of God through the neighbor as servant. It is the exercise of a care that is deeper than concern. It is a rich yearning to be fulfilled as well as fulfilling. It is symbolized by several images from Scripture, among which are: Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, the parable of the neighbor, and the pilgrims at Emmaus, to name a few.

### Ministry as deep caring.

This kind of ministry is born of deep caring for one another. When one cares, a commitment is made, a concern is enacted, and an idea or prayer becomes flesh, living and in the midst of that ministry. Within this ministry of care,

the feeling engendered is a response because one extends oneself to the other. This extension is risky for we are most vulnerable, although open, when we are extending and concentrating our care-power on another. This is the tending image of the shepherd role-model in the Bible. It means being with another, assisting and enabling them, giving heed to their responses, and guarding them from danger. Most importantly, it means our ministry is done with compassion, as opposed to tolerance; with tenderness, as opposed to a sense of duty; with respect, as opposed to obligation. This ministry creates a fundamental attitude in the care-giver and the care-taker that fosters independence in each. One sees this in the family when the toddler learns to walk, when the adolescent establishes enough distance from parents to again be close to them.

#### Jesus as the model for this ministry.

Church members express this ministry when they seek to fully embody the Jesus model for their ministry and life style, whenever they seek to pioneer in being "the servant for the neighbor" or to be "for others". The church is the laboratory for this care to be practiced, but the whole world awaits for persons ministering with understanding, compassion, and sensitivity to leave the laboratory and be in a care-service ministry to persons wherever.

This form of ministry, whereby theology is made flesh in us, wherein the truth is deed carried forth, is the privilege of all the people of God resident in the local parish and

congregational structures. This is utterly crucial for all of us needs an at-onement with others. This is especially true when the jarring events test the human spirit, and throw off-balance the life-cycle of the family. We of the church should recover this shape of ministry for the whole person, and to begin practicing diligently the total arts of that caring ministry.

#### SUMMARY

This concludes the first section of the project. I have defined the church and framed it with the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I have given a viewpoint of what I think ministry should be, in the light of my doctrine of the church. Having laid the theological basis for ministry, our second section will be to show what a ministry to the family may look like, when developed out of the understandings discussed in the first section of the paper.

The major task of this project is to design a model for ministry to the family. We will begin with a general overview of the family, then continue with a look at the four cycles in the life of the family: birth and parenting, adolescence, mid-life, and aging. With each cycle, I will point to some possible forms of ministry to the family during that particular cycle.

## PART II

### A MODEL OF MINISTRY

## Chapter 2

### THE FAMILY

Even a casual observer of our social scene is apt to have some questions about the survival rate and odds for the family. Is the family coming unglued, or is it the last outpost of affection in a world increasingly more hostile? Does it promote togetherness or isolation? Is it supportive or sexist, an appendage of capitalism dedicated to consumerism, or the repository for traditional values? Will increased leisure time herald a renaissance of family feeling, or is the family dead, except for the first year or two of child-rearing? Is the family too bruised to recover from the strain of serving as society's "shock absorber", or does social turbulence make it even more important for individuals to have the "portable roots" made possible by the nuclear family (streamlined to include parents and children, but no grandparents)? Will current economic problems deprive families of needed safety valves (vacations, summer camps, baby-sitters) to the detriment of all, or will they mean fewer impulsive divorces and more long-range cohesiveness?

The popular and professional literature on the future of the family confronts these issues and many others. Some social critics say we are too child oriented; others say we are a society against children. Statistics reveal our families spend vast amounts of money on children. But, look at the increasing cases of abused children. Those cases being reported serving to reveal only the tip of the iceberg. And



there are no firm statistics on the emotionally abused child, only the physically abused child.

Is contraception a blessing because it enables a woman to control her fertility, or were men and women less fettered by guilt when they could blame the fates and not themselves on unwanted children? Is parenthood the price one ordinarily pays for a sex life, or will it, when it becomes a matter of choice universally, be lifted to a new level of human value? Pro-natalists argue that a couple cannot be a family without children, but many others prefer to believe that adults can be a family to each other without becoming parents.

Amidst all the controversy surrounding the American family, one thing is clear: the American family can no longer be pictured as white, middle-class, monogamous, father-at-work, mother-at-home-with-children in a suburban one-family home. This definition would now exclude more than half the population.

New domestic arrangements are now being made. About sixty percent of our population live in some domestic arrangement other than the nuclear family.<sup>1</sup> More than half of all women between 18 and 64 years of age are in the labor force, and homemaking is no longer considered a full-time job by most people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Farson, Birthrights (New York; Macmillan, 1974), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>U.S.Woman's Bureau, The Myth and the Reality (Washington: U.S.Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 1.

The concept of family is being redefined by accelerating family cycles, changing sexual mores, demographic factors, present and future birth technologies, an increase in parents without partners, and a yearning for the companionship of the extended family.

Briefly stated, today more and more people want to stop feeling so alienated from significant others. Yet, traditional family life is under attack for being so stultifying, by being bound by role specialization rather than by conditions permitting the free assumption of identity.<sup>3</sup> The resurgence of feminism promises to have a profound effect on the family. It is against the back-drop of self-actualization that the current feminist movement is being enacted.

Presently, there is the awareness that both mother and father play a shared role in parenting. Both together want and need support from the larger society if both are to meet Freud's definition of the mature person: someone who can work and love.

There is reason to be optimistic, but we must realize that we are in an age where there are no pat answers or easy solutions. Not all mothers should work outside the home 40 hours a week; not all fathers can become good cooks; not all pre-schoolers will thrive in a day-care center Monday through Friday; not all unattached men and women will have deliberately chosen to remain single. Not all traditional values are bad; not all feminist demands are good. But this is part of the

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<sup>3</sup> B. L. Neugarten and J. W. Moore, Middle Age and Aging (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 6.

excitement of the future. No longer will we be so pre-occupied with doing what others think is right. This is a great time for the local church to minister to the family, as a whole system regardless of the number or arrangements of them within the family.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE BIRTH, PARENTING, AND NURTURING CYCLE

The earliest cycle of the family enterprise is that of birthing, parenting, and nurturing. The American myth of motherhood (fatherhood as well) is that once the baby is born, everyone lives happily ever afterward. Too many realities shatter that myth. The postpartum period is laden with explosive situations. This is the most vulnerable period for the mother, the father, the infant, the siblings. Health care systems often do not fit the needs of the family at this time, and seldom do the ministries of that family's church. Both care systems choose to care only for the infant and the mother, letting the rest of the family shift for themselves. Birth is indeed a family affair, from beginning to end. The family is a whole system; a process delicately tuned and balanced. It is easily put out of synchronization at this period.

The post-partal period.

The period immediately following birth is a delicate, vulnerable, but rich time for beginning mother-child relationships, for continuity of husband-wife relationships, for any infant-sibling relationships, and for the nuclear family's survival. The church must be alert to all the nuances and tones of the family at this period, or its ministry, if it exists for that family, will be misplaced, misleading, and even misbegotten.

The survival of the nuclear family is wholly dependent upon the husband-wife relationship. The added stress of the

post-partal period, coming on top of the stress and exhaustion of labor and delivery, strains the marital bond. There is always joy and disillusionment, alienation and reconciliation, always resentment, sometimes anger, on the part of each one in the post-partal period. All the members feel, consciously or sub-consciously, knocked about by the dislocation and resultant relocation within the family structure and process. At this time, the family pattern looks like scattered balls on a billard table after the break. The coming together of the family into a nurturing and loving-caring cell requires attention, healing, discipline, and love at this time.

#### Ministry of presence.

The local church's ministry to the family in this initial cycle is crucial. That "ministry of presence" begins as early as when the parents were adolescents, when they sought the church's counsel for marriage. The ministry of the church is educational, spiritual, communal, physical, and emotional to the whole family during this period. There are separate components in the ministry to the family during the birth-parenting cycle, but they all form a process-network which incarnates the church's faith stance, value system, or love support network. What the church believes, values, and practices within the love ethic must be real, human, appropriate, and living in its ministry to the family during this cycle and through all the cycles of a family.

### Design for ministry.

Without going into detailed designs for this ministry to the family at this cycle, here are a few possibilities for ministry which a church can undertake. Where the congregation is small, an ecumenical effort would be a doubly enriching ministry, to the families and churches alike. There is a blending of educational, spiritual, communal, physical, and emotional values. Seepage flows from one emphasis to the other. Thus, we will not breakdown the ministry into these elements, even though some may be more spiritual or communal or emotional.

1. Pre-birth workshops for pregnant couples, with emphasis on feelings, images, and dreams. It can be facilitated by a team of people from the various professional disciplines: pediatrician, clergy, obstetrician, family counselor, nurse, teacher, or financial advisor.
2. Sacraments of baptism and confirmation, as well as ritual of name-giving.
3. Mothers'-Day-Out.
4. Parents'-Night-Out.
5. Parent-Baby Showers after the birth, so the father can participate and share.
6. Family centered worship so the community at worship is fully human, and not only adult, so children feel and know they are a part of the faith community.
7. Intergenerational events so an extended family is experienced and in which persons in any cycle of the family life are enriched and fulfilled.
8. Establish a Crisis Prevention Team of skilled professionals from within the church.
9. Marriage Possibilities and Potential Weekends.

10. Family Financial Planning Workshops
11. Parent-Effectiveness Training
12. Fathering and Mothering Skill Training
13. Baby sitting services
14. Audio-Visual Resources Center
15. Celebrate wedding anniversaries and birthdays of children during the month the marriage was begun.

## CHAPTER 4

## THE ADOLESCENT CYCLE

The second segment of the family cycle is the period of adolescence, a period of pangs and pains, of reverberating crises shockwaves, of all kinds of explosions, feelings, changes, and traumas. The adolescent period is fraught with as much emotion and unsettling elements as the birthing period. We need to demystify the adolescent, especially their behavior. We must always begin this task with where the teenager is at in their developmental process.

Description of the adolescent.

Deciding where that is may be a large problem, for the adolescent often seems to be in many different places at once. For example, John may fall in and out of love within the span of a week. Jane may be wearing lipstick and eye makeup and playing with her old dolls in a 24-hour period. Mark may be complaining vehemently because his parents are so old-fashioned and traditional in their beliefs, all the time folding himself into yoga positions that have been around for centuries. Mary may be complaining because her teacher does not clearly tell her how to do an assignment, moments after decrying that her mother tells her exactly how she should do everything. And on it goes, from the request for more rules to a plea for fewer rules. Inconsistency, uncertainty, and a need to disagree with adults seem to be a frequent state of being for the adolescent.

In fact, they seem to be very fluid, and in a very loose state of development, which often puzzles them as



much as it puzzles the adults in their lives. A friend of mine once noted that an adolescent is "someone who doesn't have their act together." When you think about it awhile, that is a profound statement.

Children generally realize that certain behaviors bring parental approval or disapproval. They generally have a good idea about which activity will bring love and which will bring parental wrath. As adults, we learn the behaviors expected of individuals in various life situations. Generally, we have learned how adults are expected to act and function in our society.

However, since adolescents are no longer children, child-like behavior on their part calls forth a plea to act their age. On the other hand, when the adolescent attempts to relate in a more sophisticated manner, adults remind the youth they are still a child and are acting too grown up.<sup>3</sup> From this, we readily see that the adolescent has a changing childhood identity, but they have not gotten it together enough to be considered an adult. There are myriad reasons why adolescence seems to be such a disturbing developmental period in our culture.

One key explanation is that our entire society is in a state of flux and adolescence. As a people, we are questioning and dissolving traditionally held beliefs concerning morality, the sexes, family life, and much more. Our society seeks an identity, in much the same way and manner as the adolescent. We, as a society, don't have our act together either. Frequently, neither does the church have its act together.

If it is true that an adolescent develops an identity by bouncing ideas, values, and feelings against a solid family structure or a clearly defined person, identifying ways in which there is difference or similarity, then the flux and lack of defined structure in our society today makes the task for youth identity doubly difficult. The inner flux and confusion of the adolescent is mirrored in the outer flux and confusion of our society. Family structures are under question, and political, economic, and social structures are under close scrutiny. Developing an identity today is a much more formidable task than in years gone by.

In reaction to the extreme changes in society as a whole, some families bind themselves rigidly together and solidify their value and belief system. This is done to a degree that it is too threatening to the family system to permit the adolescent son or daughter to differentiate from the family and develop an identity which may be different from the family identity.

In such a situation, the only way to pull away from the family system is to escape. The increased incidence of adolescent suicide, drug-addiction, alcoholism, and sexual promiscuity are symptomatic of extreme attempts to escape from a family or societal system that does not permit an adolescent to gracefully, or even awkwardly, disentangle in order to develop an identity as a separate human being.

This striving for separateness while maintaining some connectedness begins during the toddler phase of development when a toddler runs away from a parent and shouts

"No!" to all requests, whether for a cookie or a nap. In an adolescent, this negativism reaches a higher level of development. The adolescent likes what their parents dislike. Conversely, the youth manages to dislike what the parents firmly believe or like. This type of behavior is often an indication that the young person is striving to find an identity by seeking ways in which he or she is different from parents and society.

A toddler needs to move away from the symbiotic relationship he or she has had with a parent, usually the mother, but an adolescent has a still more complex task. The adolescent needs to move further from parents and toward the outside world. In addition, the adolescent needs to clarify his or her autonomy as a separate person by defining who he or she is and in what he or she believes.

The easy way out would be to take the values and beliefs of the parents carte blanche. This, however, would be the parents' identity, not that of the adolescent. A developmental task of adolescence would remain nascent. Many developmental crises seen during the middle years include some unfinished identity work from adolescence.

Developing an identity may be painful for an adolescent, but his or her growth may also shake up the family system. Here, again, inner stress is accompanied by environmental stress and the young person develops fears related to violation of unwritten family rules or violation of family loyalty. Here, loyalty to family may conflict with an inner pressure toward growth and development.

Other fears center on conflicts about dependency needs and a natural striving for independence. Adolescents frequently fear a loss of control over themselves or their environment. The result is often rigid or compulsive behavior. This can be noticed in the fears and confusion with human sexuality, which arise from the adolescent's need to establish an adult sexual identity.

Subsumed under sexual identity are the hormonal changes in adolescence which seem not only to precipitate many obvious physical changes, but also to stimulate and intensify an adolescent's emotional life as well. This further adds to the caldron of teeming emotions and feelings which at times are a part of every adolescent's inner life.

Once we see adolescent behavior as demystified, how do we deal with an adolescent so his or her growth, as well as our own growth is enhanced and fulfilled?

Many adults have trouble with adolescents because they may never have fully worked through their own adolescence. They may have sailed through that period of life as a good teen-ager. They may not have made any waves and may have taken on their parents' identities, values, and beliefs without question. In these cases, for these adults, the middle years may become a time in life when they do some growing and questioning which they avoided during adolescence. Working and/or living with adolescents can stimulate their deepest fears and anxieties. However, as a bonus, adults can grow if they accept these fears and anxieties and

begin to look at the reasons for their extreme reaction to adolescent behavior.

Ministry possibilities.

This has been a brief sketch dealing with the pains and pangs and possibilities of the adolescent. All our churches have great opportunities of ministering to the family during this segment, dealing with the whole family process as well as the individuals within the family network. This is where the humanizing process of the church can be felt best. While the pastor is often looked upon as the person to do most of this ministry, most congregations have a wealth of sensitive and supportive adults simply waiting to be recruited and given basic training for adolescent-effectiveness.

As a professional, I find it most useful to first observe my own reactions to the adolescent, the parents, and the significant others for the adolescent. Working through my own parenting task with two adolescent children of my own has been a great help in this. If I find myself making strong judgments, I begin to look at myself rather than placing all the blame on the adolescent.

In addition, I sometimes check my reactions with the adolescent and the family. For example, if I share it with them and ask if they feel it. Sometimes it may be my own problem, but frequently it is an opening for the family members to be honest with their own feelings. Risk taking

by me makes risk taking by the adolescent easier. And the level of confidence climbs immediately.

When adolescents talk with me about a problem they have in relating to another person, I encourage them to try to deal directly with peers or teachers, rather than just telling me. Discussing problems with a third person may be the way of avoiding change in problem situation-relationships. It can be a stop-gap to maintain the status quo. Unpleasant feelings are ventilated through a third person and change does not take place in the original relationship. The adolescent can be encouraged to discuss the unpleasant feelings with persons directly involved, and supported in learning ways of dealing with others. Relieving discomfort and anxiety is only the first step. The adolescent has to do the second step. This requires the practice of solving the problem rather than decrying its existence.

When adolescents complain about how misunderstood or mistreated they are, it is important to get them to assume responsibility for the part they play in a frustrating relationship. It is essential that an adolescent move beyond the point of blaming and condemning and realize they have the inner power to change the distressing situation. It is sometimes easier to complain about an unsatisfying relationship than to do something about it to change it constructively. However, it is also a reinforcement of the status quo.

Another technique I have found effective in helping adolescents to develop a sense of strength and power as individuals is to get them to accept responsibility for their part of every interaction. They are encouraged to explore a variety of ways to deal with a person or a situation. Sometimes we role play, reversing the roles occasionally, or practice different ways of responding to unsatisfactory situations. If one way doesn't work, they are encouraged to try another.

Adolescents and adults often get into the rut of reacting and responding in the same old dead-end way. If one type of behavior doesn't accomplish the desired outcome, the adolescent is encouraged to try different ways. My frequent comment is, "You can't change anyone but yourself. However, if you change the way in which you react, others will have to change their behavior in order to relate to the new you." This applies to more than just the adolescent; it works throughout the whole family system.

One essential requirement when dealing with adolescents is not to moralize. Instead of laying a moral judgment upon an activity or choice, try to explore with adolescents the reasons why people indulge in drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. Discuss the fact that every problem was a solution to another problem. For example, a person might have found smoking to release the boredom or the anxiety of a distressful situation. That solution becomes a problem in its own right when the individual kept smoking whenever

he or she met a stressful situation.

Just as responding in the same pattern leads to a dead-end, so does relying on the same old way for tension release. Thus, it isn't drugs or alcohol that are the problem, it is the way in which the teenager reacts to or uses them that creates the problem. We explore a number of ways for reducing stress and strain and tension. Since stress and crisis are part of the human situation, every young person needs to learn how to deal with crisis.

I am not using the word "crisis" in a negative or pejorative sense. The Greek root of the word "crisis" suggests the potentiality for change, the critical point wherefrom you can develop in the wrong or right direction, where the old is giving birth to the new. This is why I speak of identity crisis at the various points throughout the family life cycle, but it is during the adolescent cycle that crisis is most definitive.

Another technique in working with adolescents is to act as a catalyst in building up the adolescent's sense of self. No matter what the adolescent is saying, or seems to be feeling, validating that feeling permits the adolescent to accept the emotion as their own. This is a pre-requisite for growth. If there seems to be incongruence between what an adolescent is saying and their non-verbal behavior, I share my observations with them. It is important to the teen-ager to realize how he or she appears to others. Then he or she is free to change or remain the same; the choice

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always remains that of the adolescent.

Most adolescents are well aware of what they "should" do today. But they get very uncomfortable sometimes when pressed with: "Your parents want you to do these things, but what do you want?" This is where they need to be nudged. It is a cop-out to respond with someone else's desires. However, for many adolescents, it is the first time anyone asked them what they wanted, rather than trying to convince them what they should do. Encouraging adolescents to become aware of their own needs and desires helps them become more autonomous and less dependent on the outside for self-definition.

Our final technique in working with adolescents is to encourage them to question some basic assumptions. For example, is it realistic to expect that we should always be happy, people should always like us, our values and ideas should be accepted by all, we should always be treated fairly, we should never make mistakes, work and school should always be a pleasure, we should never be frustrated?

Another assumption which causes so much havoc in the world of today is this: if a child experiences problems, it is the fault of the parents. One encounters this syndrome of blame-it-on-the-parents along all the developmental stages of the family system, but it is most prevalent in dealing with adolescents.

The list is endless. Each of us can look within and find some rather unrealistic assumptions which underlie our life-style. Yet much of the conflict and distress we experience is often an outgrowth of accepting these very unrealistic assumptions. Adolescence is an ideal time to revise the assumptions upon which one's life is built.

The greatest gift that can be given an adolescent is for the significant adults to share their individuality with the adolescent and permit him or her to share their individuality also. This is a working theology of neighbor, servant, word-deed, I-Thou, community, full-service ministry at its best. This sharing of uniqueness is the bridge where separateness and connectedness meet. A separate identity is essential, but humanity needs to be shared. It is the bridge that reaches both sides of the generation gap.

Many churches assume that a college adult is the best age for their youth minister. I would hold the concept that a better age would be someone more solidly into their mid-years, who has completed the work of adolescence successfully and which few persons in their second or third decade have done. Solidity of one's own identity, congruence, belief and value systems is essential for a meaningful ministry to youth.

Any design for youth ministry would be built upon activities that encourage intellectual growth, emotional expansion and stability, identity of self structure, meaningful relationships, and community acceptance and effectiveness..

## CHAPTER 5

## THE MID-LIFE CYCLE

From the segment of birthing and parenting, we have explored some of the mysteries of the teen years and offered some hand-grips for ministering to this segment of the family system, and in these ways, empower and free adolescents to "get their act together" successfully.

We are now ready to take a plunge through the middle years of the family cycle, the quality and character of which is often determined by what has taken place in the growth patterns and developmental habits along the way from birth. We have skipped over the segment of the family cycle that falls between the end of adolescence and the onset of the middle years because of the limits imposed by this project. Suffice it to add, those years are crucial also and offer immensely rich and rewarding opportunities for ministry in a local church.

Overview.

In between the images of childhood, the lingering hopes of adolescence, and the twilight of old age with its certainty of death, lie the middle years. In the period of life between ages 30 and 55, many men and women suffer reality shocks, identity crises, and socio-psychiatric and physical difficulties that make it seem like the teen-years revisited. For many, it is a time of powerlessness, meaninglessness, depression and uncertainty. These are

the recurring signs of the human condition. Those who work in the helping-healing ministries have many opportunities to help people recognize the dilemmas that arise during the middle years, to resolve them, to fulfill the promises, and to enjoy this potentially productive, self-affirmative period of life.

Not everyone experiences mid-life crises. There is great variation in how the middle years are experienced. Economic class, status, sex, marital status, size of family, and prevailing cultural norms are but some of the impinging variables. Expectations of life and of other people and images of self, formed by the time of adolescence, sometimes collide with the realities of daily experience in the middle period. Those expectations must be re-worked, re-formulated again, especially when conditions governing events can not be changed. There are circumstances especially germane to mid-life that do arise: aging, illness, divorce, death, career choices and changes, and the like. For some people in the middle age group, these events may be experienced as crisis.

A crisis occurs when the available strategies for coping of an individual fail to meet the requirements of the current problem or situation that has arisen. The supporting person then has the task of assessing the problem being confronted and the potential strengths of the individual involved, and to assist the person in developing the coping actions which are essential for constructive resolu-

tion to the problem at hand. We see this supportive ministry at work in marriage enrichment or marriage counseling. We see this ministry dynamic working at mid-point career development, role differentiation, and value clarification. And also in the polishing and developmental task begun in adolescence.

The term "mid-life crisis" is of recent origin. It is not yet clear whether or not this phenomenon is a developmental or generational event. Some books on personality development suggest that those folks who experience mid-life crisis have hang-ups from earlier experiential periods in which competencies necessary for the task and realities of the middle years should have been developed. One can frequently observe this theory applied to the behavior exhibited by one or both partners in a mid-life divorce proceeding; the behavior is a replay of adolescent patterns.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the middle-aged person decided during or at the close of adolescence, to make money, have a comfortable home, rear two children, all the while enjoying life, and then discovered during the mid-years that those were not goals or values of adequate scope for purposes of identity and personal fulfillment. In that case, mid-life crises are a matter of goal selection rather than being inherent in personality development.

A case can be made that a rapidly changing society imposes new demands upon persons who minister to folk in

the mid-years of their life cycle. A constant retraining must be assumed by the church of its workers if it is to maintain a full-service ministry to persons caught in the mid-life struggle, both within and without the church. People in this form of ministry must be alert to look for gaps and lacks in personal development, and also recognize, investigate, and understand new situational strains to which people respond and for which the helping ministry of the "neighbor" may be needed. There are several areas of such middle-age stress. We will only be able to identify them, so they serve as guidelines for developing a ministry to middle-year adults.

First is role transition, which is complex and often emotion-laden. The ability to shed a role, or a part of it, and take on new roles or new role actions, and do that smoothly, with minimum stress, is a complex, but necessary interpersonal competence. This competence is most crucial for productive and self-affirming living during the middle years of life, for during this quarter of a century of living, many role transitions are made. In a society that values youth more than anything else, the transition to being and acting like forty can be felt, experienced, and expressed as a crisis.

The church can be of great help in providing ways for middle adults to examine changing roles, developing feelings, and making manageable the stress-points in the marital relationship. The church's ministry must hold middle adults in loving embrace and a supportive-connective

ministry. This is best illustrated by the "servant" role of the church, of its members "being servants as well as doing service", of an "I-Thou neighborhood" in the making. Here, the clergy is the lead-person for this ministry, being responsible for recruiting and training persons who have successfully managed their own middle course or who have professional skills and competence. Training retreats, value clarification workshops, goal setting, time-line projections, role examination experiences, and various vital support groups can be parts of this exciting ministry to middle adults.

New social requirements are a second area of mid-life crises. New social norms are generating in this society. The changes are heralded by the universal Declaration of Human Rights, civil rights, Equal Rights Amendment, Freedom of Information Act, concern for the environment, and the list goes on. The feminist movement is propounding the importance of choice, autonomy, and human values equally applicable to men and women. The opening up of all career fields for women with entry based solely on capability, experimentation with many different life-styles for adults, and greater involvement of men in parenting and housekeeping are all signs of a more fluid and flexible society in the making. Those persons now in mid-life may frequently face new dilemmas when the form and content of their own lives contrast or conflict sharply with upcoming norms.

Here, let the church gather together in supportive

grouping and connectiveness, those mid-life adults who are looking for mid-course career corrections and developments. Here again, life-lines can be re-plotted, goals and values re-tested for authenticity and congruence. The couples in these groups can investigate their marriage covenants, family priorities, and use of resources - money, health, time, family, friends, job, church, talents, each other - all for the intent of refocusing on the real and necessary beliefs and practices. Some very solid human development and growth potential can be birthed out of these experiences. As new social requirements come upon the family in mid-life, afterwave patterns of a "future shock" are created. The church can be of greater and increasingly fulfilling help in the human enterprise potential of persons at this point.

A third area of mid-life crises is the area of physical changes. Some degree of congruence between the view one holds of oneself and the actual appearance and smooth functioning of one's body as a physical organism is essential for health, be it of mind, body, psyche, or spirit. This requires gradual changes in self-view as aging occurs, and it requires radical shifts in perception of self when accidents, surgery, and other occurrences produce disfigurements and other obvious changes in the body. This is an exceedingly complex phenomenon about which very little is known, but which is central to continuing full-health. The recovery from disfiguring surgical trauma - amputation or mastectomy - requires a deep wellspring of self-resourcefulness. The church



must be ready and willing to be a healing body in these situations. The reworking of one's body-image takes the help of a loving community. This is when and where the "neighbor" concept is most apparently applied, with the servant-service and I-Thou committed to the recovery of a wholeness.

### Forms of ministry.

The ministry for this group of people requires a fine-tuned sense of skill, tact, and perceptiveness. And a practitioner who is comfortable with his or her own body chemistry, image, and congruence as well. This is an area of many "closet" feelings and deeply private pains. Sermons and intentional pastoral calls can be used to undergird this ministry. An open availability by the pastor to those who seek aid for their imaging and re-patterning is crucial.

Most churches work at having a ministry to children and youth and senior adults, but few have a full-ministry intentionally serviced for the middlers of the congregation or the church's community impact area. This is the age group who are the prime movers and the action-builders in a church. They do most of the bill-paying, people recruitment, program building, and policy making in the local church. Yet, what is the ministry uniquely to them other than worship, teaching a class, being a church office holder? None whatsoever, in most churches. The children, youth,

and newly marrieds receive a full share of church money, time, leadership, skills, and energy. But nothing is offered dealing with mid-life crises, no opportunities for mid-life corrections and goal-telescoping. No ministry allows them to explore their pains and pangs and adjustment dislocations with their peers. Middlers need to revisit the adolescent years. The syndromes are uncannily similar.

I feel a gap in my ministry at just this point, as I notice the middle adults of my congregation have no real touch-base in the program of the church. I am a middle adult and look for something to support me in my pattern makings. My effort to develop a ministry to middle adults is directed at answering the question: How does one make the most of the middle years? After all, many men and women journey through the middle years and beyond, enjoying a greater achievement than they had previously realized.

We have described the mid-life crises and suggested some forms for a ministry to persons in this cycle of life. We want to flesh out the bones for mid-life ministry with an over-view of mid-life and insights into ministry there.

Mid-life can be a mourning period, and just as in depression after a death in the family, there may be withdrawal, loss of appetite, insomnia, difficulty in concentration, and general disinterest in people and things. It is wise to remember how intricately the integrative mechanisms work to bring a multiplicity of influences to bear on behavior.

Reaction to middle age is determined both by attitudes and by circumstances, and the middle years become significant through relationship to the whole course of personality development. It is a time of tension, of looking back at what was, real or fantasized, at what is, and a time to plan ahead to determine what is meaningful in the life-time one has left. The anxiety can be a stimulant to new growth as it jars a person out of a rut of routine and spurs them on to new attitudes and behaviors more appropriate to this particular stage of development. However, excessive anxiety can also disorganize and disable. It is often based on a person's sense of obligations and responsibilities to others and to oneself, and the attitude of others.

Life is lived by most of us with little deliberate thought and awareness. We take problems as they come, solving them one by one, and relating to others in a habitual way. We all experience ups and downs, but our lives generally stay in equilibrium and are manageable. Living only becomes difficult and troublesome when there is an imbalance between the situation and the resources available to it. Such situations, for some people, come in the middle years.

Most people work through difficult problems by themselves; others have a lingering depression with various incapacitating symptoms. Women have a genuine body crisis with a wide range of symptoms. Men only less so. Anxiety and depression are the common denominators of both. A

conditioned expectation of trouble, from adolescence on, can contribute to anxiety and depression. Other possible causes are genetic predisposition, stressful life events, personality traits, guilt, feelings of inadequacy and frustration, as well as other endless combinations.

The outcome of a mid-life crisis is influenced by the quality of help which an individual receives from family, friends, church, and caregivers in trying to work out a new adaptation. Individuals in crisis often turn for help to people who work or live near them, people who have a capacity for empathy and understanding. It helps to take an approach through which the person learns to uncover the causes of the crisis and then systematically works out a plan of action to deal with the most crucial of these causes. Persons who seek to help an individual or family in crisis need to understand the nature of the crisis and have the necessary therapeutic skills for intervention.

The timing of help is important, even crucial frequently. Intervention should support the whole family system, and its capacity to support a family member. (This is true for all the cycles in the life of a family.) Families can be helped to share the painful effects of the crisis and dislocation they may bring. In this way, the members of the family comfort and support each other. Instead of sitting around, moping and depressed, they should be encouraged into activities that comfort and challenge,

that support positive responses to mid-life crisis. Such activities should encourage renewal and re-creation of the spirit.

Instead of exploring the antecedents of the mid-life problem, it is important to deal with the current realities. The focus is to help the individual master the problems of middle age by confronting them. Energies, skills, experience, and coping mechanisms should be focused on dealing with the issues of the immediate emergency. Running away, leaving one's job, having an extra-marital affair, drugs and alcohol, or scapegoating others need to be discouraged.

This means having all the information possible to deal effectively with problems as they present themselves, providing support to work the issues through, and then as the person learns to cope, giving the help needed to establish the new goals and directions. Middle age is a time then, to gauge the opportunities that lie ahead, as well as assessing past opportunities or the lack of opportunities.

Normal development implies coping with changes, even stressful or swift change, such as sudden death, loss of a love-relationship, physical crisis, or loss of job. Even if it were possible to avoid all stress and challenge of the middle years, we would not wish for this. The successful mastery of the challenges of the middle years provides opportunities for personality growth and

enrichment, for spiritual deepening and discipline, for emotional maturing, and for physical confidence and competence. It is possible to identify circumstances which precipitate crises during these years and to modify the situation so the impact is reduced. The outcome can be influenced by the quality of help provided.

A final word for a ministry to mid-year adults. It would be fore the church to offer a course, of six weekly sessions, several times a year on the theme, "Preparing for Old Age". Lectures would be offered in the medical, social, judicial, financial, and spiritual problems of old age. Seminars, workshops, group discussion, and audio-visuals would be the methodology. The course would build a fellowship which preserves folk against loneliness. However, it is not enough to study and be better informed about old age. People must take a long, hard look at their way of life now as a middler. Are we in control of our life? If not, why not? We need to answer the issue: What is the point of my life? This course would be a time of "stock-taking", of working to avoid the risks of prolonging the straight line of our absorbing lives. It would make the point of old age and retirement less sharp and dangerous. This is the time when we can decide to lead our lives, not be led by them. This makes sure that our lives can expand again in retirement. Our mid-years are a time for reversal, away from specialization and to a re-opening of ourselves to a wider horizon.

## CHAPTER 6

## THE AGED ADULT CYCLE

The last cycle of family life with which we will deal and develope in some detail a ministry toward is that of aging. The aged are one of the greatest untapped natural resources in our churches. They are those persons living out the options of aging. This is the last stage of human development, it is the final life cycle towards which all our life movements have been inexorably flowing. My parishes throughout my ministry have been blessed with an abundance of the aging. They have often been our "silent spectators" because the church did not understand them, had no time for them, had no place for them, saw no need to develope any unique ministry for them. If I have learned anything from my aging friends it is this: listen to the aged.

Overview and personal observations.

Listen to the aged for they will tell you about living and dying. Listen to the aging for they will tell you and enlighten you about problem-solving, sexuality, grief, sensory deprivation, and survival. Listen to the aged for they will teach you how to be courageous, loving, and generous. They are a distinguished faculty without formal classrooms, tenure, or sabbaticals. They teach not from books, but from long experience in living.

Perhaps, we too, really learn about life by living it, learn about death only through dying. Yet, to be helpful to the aged, we need to understand what makes them happy or sad, comfortable or uncomfortable, anxious or serene, generous or stingy. We need to know not so much about where they are going as where they've been, what they've had, what they've given up, how they feel about the past; all that will color how they feel about the present. It is through listening and observing that we absorb some of their wisdom and strength about living.

Many of my aged "teachers" have had little education, had suffered deprivation, three wars, a depression, and more; and when they taught me, they were frail in body, some in mind. Some were blind, deaf, aphasic, paralyzed, or had chronic brain syndrome. All needed physical attention, patience, kindness, care that is heavy with psycho-social components and deep spirit overtones. It was in giving this care, as I could, that I listened, watched, and learned.

The elderly continually open up new vistas on problem-solving. They have an ability to squint hard at a problem, carefully sort through all their years of living, and then pull out of their memory files, solutions that make textbook answers seem bland and slightly impractical and inappropriate. They have taught me to ask, "What do you think should be done?" instead of my usual glib, "You should...".



Old people remember their history and do a lot of reminiscing, which is an adaptive aspect to aging. Old people are eager to talk, especially those living alone. This is "conversation deprivation", which we often ignore, especially if they are rambling on about "the old days".

During pastoral visitation, I have often felt trapped by the elderly shut-in who is on a reminiscing binge because of conversation deprivation. Then I discovered this was a gift I often refused. Then it finally got through to me. Until I could receive the gift these elderly gave me, I permitted the giver little pleasure in their performance. The importance of memories and sharing of them has been underestimated: we need to heed the instruction: "Listen attentively".

Like others, we have been caught up in the taboos about sexuality in older people. We have absorbed many of the "no-no" attitudes about them. These myths and stereotypes still continue to affect our practice of ministry in the church. One cannot help seeing the expressions of sexuality in the aged, and they are not quickly or easily swept under the rug anymore.

We have been slow to learn about sexuality in all stages of human development and have been reluctant to accept a leadership role for the church in regard to sexuality. This is especially true in regard to sexuality in the elderly.

The aged are connoisseurs in the management of grief. Our problem is that we do not know how to let them grieve, nor do we even encourage them to grieve in their own unique ways. Grief work must take its own form and expression, and we need to consider whether we should encourage such expressions of grief in the elderly.

As with grief, the elderly can also be master teachers about approaching death. I stood by the bedside of a woman dying of cancer and was thrilled to hear her tell me that her goal was to be a human being in death. She had made Tillich understandable for me, she had supported me with wise counsel during the crises of my three-year pastorate at her church. Her 82 years of living made her an authority. I loved her and wept during the middle of the funeral message I was delivering. She had decided to die without surgery or life-support measures. The dying individual is still the best teacher about the process of dying.

In these preliminary sketches, I have tried to share why the last cycle of the family life is so rich and fulfilling, of how indebted I am for what the aged have taught and do teach me in my ministry. These sketches are an invitation to join me in deeper exploration of the aging cycle of the family.

### What is aging?

Our own aging is very unique and deeply personal.

Still, some aspects of aging may be held in common; such as a universal concern and problem in aging. The process of aging touches all human activity-- some in a central way, some in a peripheral manner.

Of the aged we ask, "Who are they?" They are like us: they are educated and simple; they are wealthy and on welfare. They are part of life and isolated. They are well and desperately ill. They are productive and also dependent. They are warm and they are mean. They give themselves to others and withhold themselves from the world.

Who are the old? We label them for our own protection. Labeling can substitute for thinking and feeling. We use stereotypes in place of perception. Labels put persons in slots and categories. However, if we want to know the humanness of persons behind the labels, if we want to see the hurt or need, to feel pain or delight; if we recognize that part of us resides in each of them and part of them in us - then we tear off labels and begin to see individuals. They are human beings. Many of them fight for humanness. As the aged begin to grow forgetful or lose competence, they battle for that quality which says they are alive, they are real, they are remembered, they are cherished.

When are we old? The answer to that question lies in the person asking as well as the person answering. "Old" is an evanescent term, a quicksilver word, holding various meanings for various human beings.

Primary aging occurs as one grows older and functions decline. Secondary aging is less well understood, but it is when cells of liver, heart, brain, eyes, and central nervous system do not divide and replace themselves as do most cells. Psychological aging takes place in a totally different way. Attitudes toward new experiences, flexibility concerning change, curiosity about experiences, humor concerning events - all these influence the psychological age of a person. Psychological age is what a person is, how they experience life. Finally, there is social age, which is that age as gauged by social roles and habits.

So, to determine who is old is made in a variety of ways. The interlocking forces of our internal makeup, plus our developed attitudes toward life, our physical strength and endurance all work to shape our life and to work for or against us as we live.

The question today is not how a person may live longer but for what may one live? Physical factors play a vital role in the aging process, but mental attitudes may cast an even longer shadow. We tend to live out attitudes - our own and those of others. Aging is but an expansion of the other experiences of life.

If we are really going to see old people, really look and see, we will remove labels and begin to view people with all their needs and eccentricities, their furies and their delights, their potential and emptiness. We

shall begin to see men and women who have lived more years than are before them and who share the hopes of each of us, that the time remaining can be lived with meaning. In the aged, we see ourselves, with our goodness and prejudices, our love and loneliness.

Aging is simply a kind of testing not unlike other challenges we face during our lives. The last third of our life span can be productive and satisfying. Attitude is the key factor. With courage, faith, and determination, the positive possibilities of our aging can be realized. We can learn to cope with our later-life challenges if we find out what they are, before we reach them and develop creative strategies for handling them, stage by stage.

We all age at the same rate - one day at a time. Still, we have an infinite variety of reactions to our aging process. Dominant for most of us is our attempt to ignore this whole process experience - after we reach a certain birthday and "hold" there forever. (So we pretend and hope.) Growing old and death are unpleasant to think about, but they are necessities. Reflexes slowing, strength waning, memory fading, senses impaired - from what we were at the peak of our powers - forecast aging to us. But aging doesn't mean total collapse. Life can have rich rewards at every age. Our losses can be compensated for by growth in other areas, when we are open to continued growth. From our very beginning, we all face challenges - physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Learning to cope is

not an exercise learned in a few easy lessons at an early age. It is a lifelong process.

We need a new attitude toward aging that insists that there can be no retirement from living, from responsibility, from citizenship. There are two great turning-points of life: passage from childhood to adulthood, and that from adulthood to old age. Both points are advances. The first to maturity, the second into a new fulfillment. It is a law of life that it must always move forward. Growing old is a step forward. One can not live the evening of life according to the programs appropriate to the morning. The wisdom of one is foolishness to the other. We measure our success at passing the first turning-point by "becoming adult" and we successfully negotiate our second turning-point by our "maturing as a person". Our success on the first point depends on outside help, while our success on the second point has to do with our own interiorization. One does not wait for old age and then handle the turning-point. A person must start at the full-flood, high noon of one's life to have a successful old age. To make a success of old age we must begin it early and not seek postponement. In middle years we should stop to think, organize ourselves with an eye to the still distant future. The manner of life in old age is determined by the manner of life in the mid-years.

Successful old age depends upon one's development all through life, each cycle expanding and growing on the

results of the previous cycle, thus bringing greater fulfillment and realized potential to a person. Added to this, is the need to finish the tasks inherent in each cycle before advancing too far into the next stage. The various social factors appertaining to how people think, the inhuman character of our society, and the concrete circumstances of our existence are the final ingredients to a successful old age.

### Cycles re-visited.

Life is a single bridge arched across the river of time; it is not a series of pontoons. Old age and infancy are but opposite ends of the span. Each day is a promise of another. The manner in which each day is lived is an indicator of tomorrow. We are the sum total of what we have been and how we have looked ahead toward the years approaching. The coping mechanisms we have learned, the abiding satisfaction we have gleaned, the interests we have acquired all combine to make our later years useful or empty. We are the product of our alternatives. The greater number of alternatives, the healthier in mind, body, and spirit we are, and the better we can cope. Some alternatives are good, others unpleasant. Yet, having a flexibility to face them and to make decisions based on them makes it easier for us to develop life styles which serve us well.

Having wholeness and inner-integration of self doesn't mean holding the key to constant happiness. It

is one's ability to squeeze the essence of joy from each experience, to meet difficulties philosophically, to face problems without being broken by them, and to endure discomfort without undue complaint.

Those who have been able to go through the stages of life, fulfilling each one before passing on to the next, have been able to come to a maturity without a backlog of immature hang-ups, which keep them from functioning in adult fashion. When we can go into our old age with an emotional maturity, we can cope with the new problems and crises that are the products of the later years. We can be flexible about change, and about the behavior and attitudes of other people. We listen to new ideas in creative fashion and can respond on the basis of our own experience and heritage. We are able to be open, see our own weaknesses at the same time we see the strengths of others. We have humility without apology and self-esteem without arrogance. Wholeness is only the ability of a human being to function with effectiveness and empathy within their cycle of life. It is part of an overall life experience and is a reflection of thousands of experiences through the accumulated years.

We are looking at the old in ourselves, in our neighborhood, in our country. We have a responsibility for our own aging. We become old, gray, wrinkled, and ill when hit by the winds of time and age. In the inexorable march of the years, we are the ones who slow the pace or halt the step, who turn into "them", who become the ones



needing attention, understanding, love, and service. Thus, before we see our responsibilities to others, we should take an inward look and find what we need to do, to personally fill our own aging process with meaning and substance. We can only enter the aging cycle with integrity if we have been able to live fully and successfully through all the preceding cycles of life.

However, a person does not reach that stage of integrity and understanding without undergoing their own life cycle, facing each stage as it occurs, and maturing to the point that they are able to pass from one to the other. Thus, we can see that our own aging process depends largely on us at any age, and on our ability to face that age realistically.

If we want our older people to be as mature as possible and as self-sufficient, we have to start with prenatal training with the parents and move along the spectrum of services and ministries through the life-cycle. Most of all, we have to look at ourselves and our rating on the continuum of growth and maturity.

If isolation is the ultimate abandonment, then involvement is our imperative commitment. Where do we fit in, at our age and time? Squarely into the middle of life, its involvement with other people, with projects, with interesting pursuits. At any age, and at all ages, we need to care - really care - about what happens to our neighbors, our planet, our civilization. And we need to

act on that care! We can not acquire this concern at sixty-five. We need to begin it long before we are old. Thus, we develop our own inner resources.

Total fulfillment is only a dream; no one knows a complete fulfillment for more than a moment at a time. We all settle for less than our basic dream. Many try to shape reality in the image of the dream. Adjusted-to-life persons work through their depression, meet disappointment, relish delights, and cope with problems.

Our life as a task is always unfinished, so we very early must learn acceptance of unfulfillment. This provokes many a mid-life crisis. This is the burden of many retirements. Fulfillment is a qualitative word, not quantitative. When we think of quality, we begin to feel unfulfilled, to see our limits most acutely. We spend our whole life struggling against our limitations. We try to make up in quantity what we lack in quality. This is true of most everything we do. Unlimited expansion is our creed. Limits may retreat, but still remain. Limits impinge and hurt us more as we grow older and time runs out on our fulfillment. Old age brings us face to face with our limits. We either collapse or cope with them. Our success depends on our life-time style and in order for us to know the joy of growing old, one must be able to accept the unfulfilled.

Unfulfillment is the adolescent agony, the mid-years turning-point, the crisis of old age. It marks all the stages of life as we each realize the finitude of our

life. We either accept it, despite everything, with a good grace, or unwillingly; or we refuse it either in rebellion or in dreams. Our attitude will control all our relations through every stage of life. The last stage - death - is only the acutest form of unfulfillment.

To accept this unfulfilled condition of our life is to say "Yes!" to all of life in its entirety. One must move from stage to stage, marching toward death. We are always evolving into life, moving constantly forward. Normal life flows harmoniously, no turning back or leaping forward. We prepare for old age only as we live fully each stage before it. We can turn over a page when it is filled up.

Our "Yes!" at every cycle of life is born out of a choice between facing reality and evasion. This tension tempts and tests us all at each stage of our pilgrimage. The decision gives two movements; first, a natural, spontaneous, necessary rebellion against what affects us. Second, a movement of acceptance, a reconciliation with ourselves, when we perceive a divorce between our reality and us. Rebellion builds a vicious cycle of itself; fiction is consolidated and our return to reality more and more difficult. If we refuse to accept reality at each developmental stage, we will find our old age very burdensome, even deathly, to us.

Growing old has little appeal for most of us. Yet, it is the inevitable end of the "game" begun at

birth. Each life cycle stage has problems and crises, but they aren't unique to that stage. They are only shadings of which life is comprised. Goethe said, "When I finish, I begin". We follow that idea who age successfully. No one event short of death - our own - should be an ending. All events, crises, problems, or hazards are stimuli to growth, which is a continuing process going on throughout the life cycle.

### Principles of ministry.

Graceful aging is our own responsibility. Since all our lives are intertwined; and if old age is to be pleasant for us, it must necessarily be good for those with whom we come in contact. This makes us look at our neighbors. What then can we do in our churches, communities, neighborhoods and cities, to see that caring and helping is happening, and people are deep on into participation in life?

First, aid them in partaking of activities. All people need a sense of being participants in life. A sense of purpose and an opportunity to contribute to others are as vital to our well-being as nutrition and rest. Old people need to be centered in the heart of life. To be busy seems to be the secret of grace. It may be half of contentment. So, we help involve senior adults around us in life pursuits. This we do for individuals we know, but we must move beyond that to a wider horizon for commitment and ministry.

Second, we should examine our community in which we live, study it to discover its care systems for all ages, but most especially for the elderly. We discover what kinds of health facilities are available for older persons and what nursing homes exist. We learn about our poverty neighborhoods and find out what resources are available, for all the people; especially the old. We look at the transportation, food stamp programs, recreation, old age assistance and welfare, in order to know if there are pockets of old people around our churches. We volunteer our own services on behalf of such people so that we can make our communities good for all ages. We concern ourselves with others of all ages of every age, but we give special regard to the silent old ones who can not speak for themselves. We do this because we are the church in the world serving all of humanity as "servants of Him who served us".

Third, we look at our society, to check out its attitudes toward the needy, including the aging, and learn how we can help shape and change its attitudes toward these people. Legislation and financing aren't enough. Revised attitudes and actions are needed to effect positive changes. To make life better for people of all ages, we need to recognize those factors in our society which exert a negative influence on us. First, we have generally unfavorable attitudes toward aging and the elderly, bordering on contempt frequently. Old people have an identity crisis and we push them into a status for doubting themselves. Second, we need to understand and accept the dynamic,

continuing nature of the aging process. Too many of us do not. Third, we need to accept older individuals as constituting a very heterogeneous group. We need to preserve their right and opportunity to make decisions that have a bearing on their own welfare and activities. This helps the aging maintain the sense of values and integrity so needed for wholeness at any cycle.

Fourth, we need a vigilance in observing programs that are instituted on behalf of older persons and to help them continue to operate effectively. We must not lose competent and valuable programs due to default and indifference.

It has been said that if one wants to know how a civilization behaves, they need only look at the way they treat their aged and their young. Each of us will be measured by that yardstick. We often adjust our steps to the toddling steps of the small child, but we are less willing to slow our stride to the tottering steps of the old. Yet, the young and the old are the same. In the child, we see the coming of age; in the old, we see what was the child. The child and octogenerian stand together, they melt into one single human being, a being for whom we show concern, and thus give meaning to the full cycle of life. Parts of every persons life live on in the hearts of others, in the memories which other people carry of good deeds or certain abilities.

A personal change and a change in society must go

together to bring about the regeneration of the old into community. They must recover in that community, a life that is as happy, interesting, and useful as possible. They must recover their place in it. But what is the place for the old? What place is the rest of us ready to give to those old, who, in their autumn years are reaching the summer of their wisdom?

Society can not only console and give leisure. Society needs the services which the old can provide better than the young. How about a second career, during retirement and before impotency arrives? Enable couples who have had a long and rich marriage to become skilled for marriage enrichment and family counseling. Recruit retired teachers to volunteer for one-to-one learning in our over-crowded classrooms. Solicit retired attorneys to work on the legal issues facing the elderly. The old need to be doing something more important than keeping occupied. A point, a purpose needs to be re-discovered.

#### Action ministries.

Thusfar, we have attempted to lay out a description of the old adult life cycle in the family, sharing some of the social, psychological, and emotional implications a church should face in establishing a service ministry to folk of this life cycle. Without going into detail, let us sketch a few possible programs a church might try as it ministers to senior adults. This, in addition to the usual worship, fellowship, and study groups of a

church. Remembering, that what a church does with this ministry must grow out of its theology of what it is.

A "Third Age College" is the answer to the need for an educational facility for the old in most communities. Such a facility makes use of the church's facilities that are often empty during the weekdays. Such a facility makes it possible for the old to broaden their minds, achieve personal maturity, and acquire a variety of new interests. Staffing would be generated from among the old themselves. It would be beneficial for middle adults to work in such a setting.

Operation Late Start would provide a new start toward independence and inter-dependence for disadvantaged older adults, and have the goal of developing the latent skills and interests they have for helping others.

A church, or group of churches, could establish a Center for the Habilitation and Education of the Elderly and Retired. (CHEER) Patterned after the Third Age College, the Center would be geared to the exchange of hobby and homecraft skills between the aged and the following generations. Many of the elderly possess skills which will be lost if they are not passed on to following generations.

Green Thumb is more than the usual garden club for senior adults with skills and expertise in gardening. This group could grow a community garden, taking flowers to shut-ins, and selling surplus fresh fruits and vegetables, the proceeds being plowed back into the project. Values to be derived: exercise, improved diet, identity, group pride,



ownership, service to others, passing on of skills, and improvement of the neighborhood. This would be doubly beneficial if community youth were yoked with seniors.

SCORE stands for Service Corps of Retired Executives. Let this group on all the various problems of the church or community and stand aside as things happen.

The list of possible forms of action ministries a church can develop is usually limited by imagination and faith, not money. Here is a list of possibles.

AIDES - Alert, Industrious, Dedicated, Energetic Service. This a group of skilled volunteers rendering humanizing services to the community, channeled through the church or churches.

FIND - Friendless, Isolated, Needy, and Disabled. A ministry group of care-givers seeking to "neighbor" with shut-ins, the alone, the handicapped or home-bound.

WORK - Wanted: Older-Residents with Know-How. A skill and talent bank for older adults to share the wealth of skill and wisdom accumulated through long tough years of being alive to living.

SERVE - Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience. Answering human needs as they find them, these old adults would forge new tools and trails for others in how to age faithfully.

LEAP - Leadership-Education-Advancing Persons. A program of old adults enriching and fulfilling not only their own life, but that of others of all ages.

Guidelines for a ministry.

Finally, a word of caution for the congregation bold and faith-full enough to attempt a full-service ministry to the elderly adult within and around it. First, an idea must be well formulated. Any program for the old must be more than "giving help", which is counter-productive. To be recepient of help is an abusing circumstance for anyone at any age, but for the old it is deathly. Our philosophy would be "keep them busy". Not on the job as long as they live, but keeping them mentally and actively engaged in jobs suited to their age and status at all times. This philosophy changes directives once it is clearly in everyone's mind. Work is one of our significant experiences of a person's life. Leisure is not the appropriate pursuit of our human experience. Our whole human structure and function has been honed to suit it to self-reliant, self-sustaining work. Only in purposeful activity does it retain its best performance. Our bodies and minds require work.

Second, there must be a consciousness raising so we think of the old as very important to any community and that they must be kept useful in it and not eased out of it.

Third, we must present the idea with a new spirit. A spirit clear and strong enough to bridge the differences between formulation of policies and execution of them at

an operational level. Ultimately, all programs of ministry become human interactions as they filter through the values and beliefs of the practitioner. We will spell out in summary detail this stress for a new spirit in our last section of this project.

Fourth, we need some focal point to centralize our efforts in ministering to the senior adult. We must give flesh to our faith as we live the vows of the "I-Thou" community which we call the church. We must find what is the cause for the state of affairs in the family at each life cycle, but especially at the stage of the old. From this, we can go on to what we can do about it. This avoids the emptying quest of who is to blame for it.

This concludes the fourth and last cycle of family life on which this paper focuses and within that focus has sought to examine some ministry possibilities for the church's service to the family. We conclude this project with the philosophy that hopefully weaves and undergirds our effort to minister.

## CONCLUSION

## INTEGRATION OF THEOLOGY INTO MINISTRY

There is a uniqueness to a church that practices this kind of ministry, both to its members as well as to the "stranger within its gates". When the words become the Word, a ministry of responsible love is extended to all persons and to the whole of each person. In this way does the church become the Church, the Body of Christ, a community in Christ. As such, it enacts again and again, both in its scatteredness and gatheredness, the drama of salvation at all the struggle-points within the human experience. This enactment is offered without ceasing on behalf of all the world. This is a blessedness which gives meaning to a person's life, regardless of its shattering jolts of change and relentless crisis, its downs and ups, its birthings and dyings.

As I attempt to practice this ministry, my hunger for meaning and fulfillment becomes integrated with my theology and psychology. My care for others becomes a daily habit, a discipline of being a servant of One who came to minister, not be ministered unto.

What Jesus meant by ministry he makes all too clear in Mark 10:45, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Jesus took Isaiah's suffering servant passage very seriously. Jesus made it clear that ministry and disciple-

ship meant skilled servanthood. It is servanthood to which he calls us, and commands we minister within. Into that servant-way all his disciples are called. The whole church - Christ in community - is a community of the servant-way. All are incorporated into the "body of Christ" and share in the task of carrying on the ministry he exercised in his body during his life on earth.

All of the church are called into a ministry of servanthood, growing out of the call to service human needs with unconditional love, wherever these needs are met. This is a ministry of deeds, not a pronouncement of words. It is where deeds define the words, rather than words describe or plea for deeds. The goal of this ministry is to increase among persons the love of God and neighbor.

This everyday practice of ministry is a basic life commitment to the person-to-person, I-Thou, "man-for-others" relationship. This is more than a casual dialogue. It is more than a series of interactions. It is the purposeful use of self to help another person grow in the ability to face reality and to discover practical solutions to problems. It is doing with persons what they can not do alone, always encouraging their will to take over as soon and as completely as possible. We succeed in this ministry when the person has found the will to take over. It is a healing ministry when persons have found meaning in life, a life-duty to achieve.

If being a servant is an attempt to help another person repair their distress, using oneself as a bridge may be an extreme demand of one's inner resources. The servant, in the sense that Bonhoeffer uses the term, needs a life-commitment to the task. With a life-commitment, one is saying to others, "Accept me as available to you."

Servants of Christ may refuse such commitment and avoid the road to being with detachment, cynicism, and callousness. They soon cease being persons, much less being servants of Christ. Or, one may accept such commitment, with its anxiety and suffering, and thereby grow to fuller meaning. Our Lord calls us to, "Follow me and die!" This is what commitment represents.

A commitment means a willingness to make life meaningful through acceptance of all the joys and sorrows it may hold. To be role models for others to see and to understand, we, within the church and the Christian faith, require an inner strength and commitment to a way of life that is reflected in our attitudes toward people and our care of them. These attitudes are reflected by support, awareness, understanding, openness, non-judgmental acceptance of people, and a willingness to help them work toward what they can become, and, in doing so, to find meaning in their own life experience, their own ministry as servant and deed.

In practical terms, this ministry of "I care about you", means offering our own life-experience to our fellow

persons by being genuinely ourselves, to lay ourselves down like a bridge, to be open, to be authentically self-revealing. Ultimately, all of this adds to a ministry of love for the neighbor. This is how a person carries out his or her life-commitment, in the world and in the church. Love is the ability to believe in another person and to reach out to them in sustained hope. Love for a person is for that person's sake, not for the benefit of the love-er.

Finally, whatever shape the ministry of a church has to people, and, as a consequence, whatever becomes the shape in the arts of that ministry by the laos of that church, both will be judged by the intensity and integrity of a life-commitment to love, to serve, to be available, to be a servant, and a neighbor. The judgment will be that which came to Bonhoeffer in Flossenbug Prison, and to our Lord in Gethsemane: COME AND DIE!

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